



# Software Diversification for WebAssembly

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## Abstract

WebAssembly, now the fourth officially recognized web language, enables web browsers to port native applications for the Web. Importantly, WebAssembly has evolved into an essential element for backend scenarios such as cloud computing and edge computing. Therefore, WebAssembly finds use in a plethora of applications, including but not limited to, web browsers, blockchain, and cloud computing. Despite the emphasis on security since its design and specification, WebAssembly remains susceptible to various forms of attacks, including memory corruption and side-channels. Furthermore, WebAssembly has been manipulated to disseminate malware, particularly in cases of browser cryptojacking. Interestingly, the predictability of the WebAssembly ecosystem, encompassing its consumers and hosted programs, is remarkably high. Such predictability can amplify the effects of vulnerabilities within these ecosystems. For instance, a defect in a web browser, triggered by a faulty WebAssembly program, could potentially impact millions of users.

This thesis aims to bolster the security within the WebAssembly ecosystem through the introduction of Software Diversification methods and tools. Software Diversification is a strategy designed to augment the costs of exploiting vulnerabilities by making software unpredictable. The unpredictability within ecosystems can be diminished by automatically generating various program variants. These variants strengthen observable properties that are typically used to launch attacks, and in many instances, can completely eliminate such vulnerabilities.

This work introduces three tools: CROW, MEWE, and WASM-MUTATE. Each tool has been specifically designed to tackle a unique facet of Software Diversification. Furthermore, these tools complement each other. We present empirical evidence demonstrating the potential application of our Software Diversification methods to WebAssembly programs in two distinct ways: Offensive and Defensive Software Diversification. Our research into Offensive Software Diversification in WebAssembly unveils potential paths for enhancing the detection of WebAssembly malware. On the other hand, our experiments in Defensive Software Diversification show that WebAssembly programs can be hardened against side-channel attacks, specifically the Spectre attack.

**Keywords:** WebAssembly, Software Diversification, Side-Channels

## **Sammanfattning**

# LIST OF PAPERS

1. ***WebAssembly Diversification for Malware Evasion***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Tim Toady, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Computers & Security, Volume 131, 2023, 17 pages*  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167404823002067>
2. ***Wasm-mutate: Fast and Effective Binary Diversification for WebAssembly***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Nicholas Fitzgerald, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Submitted to Computers & Security, under revision, 17 pages*  
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2309.07638.pdf>
3. ***Multi-Variant Execution at the Edge***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Pierre Laperdrix, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Moving Target Defense (MTD 2022), 12 pages*  
<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3560828.3564007>
4. ***CROW: Code Diversification for WebAssembly***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Orestis Floros, Oscar Vera-Pérez, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus  
*Measurements, Attacks, and Defenses for the Web (MADWeb 2021), 12 pages*  
<https://doi.org/10.14722/madweb.2021.23004>
5. ***Superoptimization of WebAssembly Bytecode***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Shrinish Donde, Jian Gu, Orestis Floros, Lucas Satabin, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus  
*Conference Companion of the 4th International Conference on Art, Science, and Engineering of Programming (Programming 2021), MoreVMs, 4 pages*  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3397537.3397567>
6. ***Scalable Comparison of JavaScript V8 Bytecode Traces***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*11th ACM SIGPLAN International Workshop on Virtual Machines and Intermediate Languages (SPLASH 2019), 10 pages*  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3358504.3361228>

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**Part I**

**Thesis**